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FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5462
INFO RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO PRIORITY 0476
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 1527
RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 6293
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 2621
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 2244
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 7096
RUEHVI/AMEMBASSY VIENNA 0091
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 3326
RUZEHAA/CDR USEUCOM INTEL VAIHINGEN GE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 000318

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [KISL](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: AQIM DEMANDS FOR THE RELEASE OF AUSTRIAN HOSTAGES

REF: A. TUNIS 227

[1](#)B. ALGIERS 109

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROBERT S FORD. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (SBU) On March 13 Al-Qaeda in the Lands of Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) posted a communique on a Jihadi website (www.shmo5alislam.net/vb/) with its conditions for the release of the two Austrian hostages Wolfgang Ebner and Andrea Kloiber (ref A). AQIM demanded the release of some of its members held in Tunisian and Algerian jails in exchange for the Austrian hostages. The communique did not list the prisoners' names, but AQIM claimed they delivered the list to the negotiating parties. AQIM urged the hostages' families and the Austrian public to press their government to respond to AQIM demands before a grace period expired on March 16, adding that if the prisoners were not released, the hostages' lives would be in great jeopardy.

[1](#)2. (C) The Algiers Arabic-language daily An-Nahar, which is well connected to the Algerian intelligence services, published on March 15 an article providing the names of five of the prisoners AQIM wants released. An-Nahar also reported that AQIM had opened a negotiation process with the Austrian government through the Austrian embassy in Algiers. The newspaper claimed that AQIM had provided the Austrians with the names of the following prisoners:

-- Amari Saifi aka El-Para: A deserter from the Algerian paratroops and former GSPC number-two; mastermind behind the abduction of 32 European tourists in 2003 in the Algerian Sahara. He was captured in 2004. (There are conflicting reports in the Algerian press as to whether El-Para is among those AQIM hopes to release. El-Para is scheduled to go on trial for terrorism in the eastern Algerian city of Biskra on March 24.)

-- Fateh Bouderbail aka Abdel-Fatah Abou Basir: Emir of AQIM's Algiers katibat, who also held a position as AQIM external relations director. Known to be very influential among AQIM leadership. He was captured in 2007.

-- Mohamed K: Assistant to Fateh Bouderbail. According to An-Nahar, he was captured with Bouderbail in 2007.

-- Fares K: Assistant to Fateh Bouderbail. According to An-Nahar, he was also captured with Bouderbail in 2007.

-- Samir Saioud aka Samir Moussaab and Moussaab abu Abdallah: A terrorist released under a GoA amnesty in 1999 who then re-joined the GSPC. According to An-Nahar, he was AQIM Deputy Commander and a ruthless terrorist. He was captured again in 2007.

¶3. (U) The March 13 communique displayed six pictures, two of which are allegedly AQIM members on Tunisian soil planning the kidnapping operation. AQIM claims the operation is headed by Sheikh Abd Al-Hameed Abu Zayed aka Abd Hamdou, emir of AQIM's Tareq Bin Ziyad Battalion (which operates in the Algerian Sahara region bordering northern Mali), under the leadership of AQIM Southern Region Emir Abu Yahia Djouadi. The remaining four pictures allegedly were taken outside Tunisia, showing the two hostages dressed in Afghan outfits and surrounded by AQIM elements carrying RPGs and AK-47s. The Austrian woman's face is digitally disfigured in the photo, apparently in response to the conservative Salafist belief that a woman's face should always be covered.

¶4. (C) Prime Minister Abdelaziz Belkhadem told the local press March 14 that Algeria was "not involved" in the Austrian hostage crisis. He added that the Austrians were kidnapped outside Algeria, and according to Algerian information, the hostages were not in Algeria. Thus, the Prime Minister concluded, the Austrian hostages are not an Algerian problem. Meanwhile, the Tunisian Defense Attache in Algiers was adamant with us on March 12 that the hostages were not taken from Tunisian soil, but rather that the Austrians got lost and wandered into Algeria by accident. He added they had not followed Tunisian National Guard rules, which require tourists to notify the nearest National Guard office before excursions into the southern Tunisian desert.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: With the Algerian government downplaying its involvement in the negotiating process and Tunisian officials in Algiers denying the hostages were kidnapped on Tunisian soil, there is uncertainty here about the nature of the

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negotiations between the Austrians and AQIM and the fate of the hostages. March 17 media reports said that AQIM had extended its deadline. If the Austrians pay a ransom (some local papers have suggested an amount of 5 million euros), AQIM's financial problems will be temporarily eased and the group could buy more weapons. Securing the release of key AQIM prisoners would allow the group to redeploy experienced leaders whose help AQIM appears to need. We judge it highly unlikely, however, that the Algerian government would release any AQIM prisoners, especially given its public refusal to acknowledge a part in this affair.
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